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# **The War In Afghanistan**

## **Capitalism and War**

When the Afghanistan war entered its 7th year, the US contributed to its anniversary by dropping a bomb on mourners at a wake. Ninety civilians, including 60 children, were killed in the attack (BBC News, 24 August 2008). Other similar atrocities have followed. Not that the conflict in Afghanistan has come cheap. The US capitalist class, for example, has had to pay to date some \$130 billion in military expenditure (Report to Congress RL3 100, p-CRS-6 2007). The British capitalist class had to fork out £3.5 billion for the war in Afghanistan in 2008 (DAILY MAIL, 14 July 2009).

A year later, the headlines were again about the mounting deaths in Afghanistan but this time it was the rising number of casualties among British troops. The Labour government was desperate to try to justify the carnage in the face of mounting criticism. Reasons for the conflict were given: curtailing the supply of heroin; creating a stable democratic Afghan government; liberating women and girls from Islamic fundamentalism; stopping terrorism being exported to Britain; and ensuring stability in the region. In an interview, Mr Brown even claimed it was “*our patriotic duty*” to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan (BBC NEWS, 12 July 2009)

These arguments are not at all convincing. Take, for example, Gordon Brown’s assertion that defeating the Taliban and Al-Qa’ida will prevent terrorism in Britain: it is purely bogus. The assertion is designed to gain support for the war through the use of fear, much as Tony Blair did by stating, untruthfully, that Saddam Hussein had the capacity to attack British interests with his “*weapons of mass destruction*”. This is an old political ruse. The American journalist, H L Mencken, warned:

*The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.*

Long after the Taliban were removed from power in Afghanistan, there have been continued terrorist attacks by Al-Qa’ida in Bali, Madrid, London, North Africa, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. Al-Qa’ida is a brand name adopted by different Islamic groups over the world and it is not a coherent military structure, located in Afghanistan, whose defeat would end ‘Islamic terrorism’.

The reasons given by the government for the war in Afghanistan are simply spin and black propaganda. Governments cannot tell the truth about their actions in pursuit of the national interest. They cannot state that the war in Afghanistan is being fought for the protection of raw resources, trade routes and to secure strategic positions of influence away from Russia’s interference in an area rich with gas, coal and oil.

Governments would not get much support by having to argue for wars to protect trade routes and to secure raw

materials. So the war in Afghanistan has to be portrayed as a morality tale between “good” and “evil”; the good intentions of the US and its allies versus the bad intentions of the Taliban and Al-Qa’ida.

Capitalism’s international rivalry is not that simplistic. Capitalism, where might is right, is split up into competing nation-states. There is no morality. The US is currently the sole superpower, which is why it can more or less behave in any way it likes: torture directly or by proxy; imprison combatants in concentration camps without trial; kill women and children with impunity - all in the pursuit of its national interest. *Realpolitik* rules.

What the British capitalist class and its governments can rely on is support from academics, journalists and the *literati*. Justification for the death and destruction in Afghanistan comes from the crude propaganda of “MY COUNTRY RIGHT OR WRONG” to sophisticated prose from the likes of Martin Amis and David Aaronovitch, the latter so exhilarated by Blair’s pro-US speech to the 2001 Labour conference that he needed to leave his house “to get some fresh air” (see our pamphlet CAPITALISM CAUSES WAR AND TERRORISM, 2001, p 5).

Elsewhere in the media, THE INDEPENDENT, which supports the war in Afghanistan, gave Colonel Tim Collins space to say that the Taliban are on the verge of destruction, and that soon everything in Afghanistan will be grand and dandy. He finished his article in almost theological exaltation with the words: “*Keep the faith*” (AFGHANISTAN REMAINS A WORTHY CAUSE, 11 July 2009). Faith in what? We are not told.

THE INDEPENDENT also opened its cage and let loose the conservative journalist, Bruce Anderson. He claimed that there were only two reasons for advocating withdrawal: “*hatred of the West*” - by this he means hatred of US imperialism – and “*thoughtless cowardice*” (13 July 2009). As far as cowardice is concerned, there are many people who would welcome being asked to contribute to Anderson’s one-way flight out to Helmand Province. No doubt he would argue that it is better to support the war from the safety of the bar of the local Conservative club than actually volunteer to do the killing and the dying.

And note the drip feed of media propaganda supporting the war. The BBC constantly films British troops fighting an invisible enemy, without giving dates, or criticism, or information as to or when and where they were filmed. These images are used time and time again in later broadcasts but the viewer is not told that they are old images.

No dead Taliban fighters are ever filmed nor the misery inflicted by air strikes on the local population. Where civilians (invariably old men or children) are shown with British soldiers by the film crews, these meetings are clearly stage-managed, not spontaneous.

The BBC NEWS does not allow critics of the war any air time to set out the Socialist case against the conflict in Afghanistan. For the BBC, this is a “good war”, a doctrine not far removed from the fatuous “*Just War*” of Cicero and Aquinas, a war that liberals can cheer on from the safety of their smart Islington houses and holiday homes in Tuscany.

Of course, there are those on the Left - including Islamic fundamentalists - who want to see the US and Britain humiliated in Afghanistan. Their doctrine is simple, and simply wrong: “*America’s enemies are our friends*”. The politics, so to speak, of idiots.

And a politics which can be traced back to the left wing support in the 1930s for Stalin’s Russia with its show trials, purges, gulags and summary executions. The capitalist left did not stop there in its support for dictatorship, police states and genocide. They went on to support Mao’s China, Pol Pot’s Cambodia, North Vietnam and the Viet Kong during the sixties, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, the IRA in Northern Ireland, Palestinian nationalists, Hoxta’s Albania, and so on. An inane support for one barbaric regime after the other.

And for what? No nationalist movement has brought Socialism one millimetre nearer. In fact, the reverse.

With the media supporting the war there is no critical examination of Afghanistan by journalists, and the Stop the War Coalition (SWC) has come to a grinding halt - its leaders unable to find supporters on the ground for its futile demonstrations and rallies. In a letter to the Evening Standard, Lindsey German, of the SWC and sometime leader of the Socialist Workers Party, states that “*we must get the troops out*”. However, Ms German and her organisation give

no Socialist rationale for why this withdrawal should take place.

Recently, the Stop the War Coalition attempted to hand in a petition to the Prime Minister to end what they called the “*unjustified*” war in Afghanistan. The letter was dishonest. The authors of the letter gave no reasons why it was an unjustified war. There was no mention of the working class in the text, and no analysis of just what British forces were doing in Afghanistan.

To be quite frank; the SWC is merely a Socialist Workers Party (SWP) front organisation. The real reasons why the SWC are against the war are submerged beneath the political water. But theirs would not be Socialist reasons for opposing the war.

It is left to Socialists, of The Socialist Party of Great Britain, to state our opposition to capitalism’s war in Afghanistan, but not for the two bogus reasons given by Bruce Anderson or the slippery prose of the SWC’s letter to the Prime Minister.

There is, in fact, a very good reason to oppose the war in Afghanistan. And that is that the war has nothing to do with the interests of the working class. Workers do not own the means of production. They do not own trade routes, raw resources or have spheres of influence to protect. They have a common interest, with workers elsewhere in the world, against the capitalist class and their state: that common interest is to replace capitalism and its wars with Socialism.

That is why Socialists oppose the war in Afghanistan, as the SPGB has opposed so many other wars. Ours is a sound and principled position that you will not find in the Stop the War Coalition, as demonstrated by the opportunist antics of its leadership.

## **War: Raw Resources, Trade Routes and Spheres of Political Interest**

Just take as an example the issue of raw resources in Afghanistan. In the 1970s, a wide variety of mineral resources were discovered. Analysis by the United States Geological Survey revealed the existence in the north of Afghanistan of a number of minerals and unexploited oil reserves of economic importance. The most important discovery was that of natural gas, with large reserves adjoining Sheberghan in Jowzjan province, near the Turkmenistan border, about 75 miles west of Mazar-e-Sharif (see M. T. Klare RESOURCE WARS: THE NEW GLOBAL LANDSCAPE OF GLOBAL CONFLICT, 2002).

The US Department of Energy estimates the gas reserves in Turkmenistan are the fifth largest in the world and Kazakhstan is soon expected to become one of the world’s largest oil producers. The wider region, around the Caspian Sea, holds more oil and gas than either the United States or the North Sea. But despite these potential riches, the Central Asian republics remain locked in economic and infrastructural dependence on Russia, the legacy of 70 years of Soviet rule (see “*Chaos in the Caucasus*”, ECONOMIST, 9 October 1999, pp 23-26).

Moscow's attempts to perpetuate that dependence, the republics’ efforts to escape it and Washington's eagerness to assist them, have created a decade-long ‘*New Great Game*’ in Central Asia (see Rudyard Kipling’s novel Kim for a fictional account of the “*Great Game*” of spying and espionage played out in the 19th century between Britain and Russia). Afghanistan is an essential part of the jigsaw puzzle because it provides part of the land route for a pipeline to the Indian Ocean (see S., J. Randall: US FOREIGN OIL POLICY SINCE WORLD WAR 1 FOR PROFITS AND SECURITY, 2008, and S. le Vine: THE OIL AND THE GLORY: THE PURSUIT OF EMPIRE AND FORTUNE ON THE CASPIAN SEA, 2007). So too is Pakistan. And another route goes via Turkey to the Mediterranean - BP have already built a pipeline for this purpose.

Besides oil and natural gas, Afghanistan is also estimated to have 73 million tons of coal reserves, most of which is located in the region between Herat and Badashkan in the northern part of the country.

Many coal deposits have been found in the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush, in Karkar and Eshposhteh, in Baghlan province, and Fort Sarkari, in Balkh province. Although Afghanistan produced over 100,000 short tons of coal

annually as late as the early 1990s, as of 1999, the country was producing only around 1,000 short tons.

Ever since the fall of the former Soviet Union, Exxon, Mobil, Chevron and the other big oil monopolies have been eyeing up the vast oil and gas wealth around the Caspian Sea, just north of Afghanistan. This region's oil reserves may reach more than 60 billion barrels, enough to service Europe's oil needs for years. Some estimates are as high as 200 billion barrels. The Caspian Sea reserves are 10 per cent of the world's known supply, worth about \$5 trillion at today's prices (RESOURCE WARS, loc cit, pp101-104).

Russia and German companies had been trying to establish a pipeline from the Caspian Sea through Eastern Europe, but U S bombing of Yugoslavia blocked this plan. Russia, however, signed a treaty with Iran for a pipeline route while China also began negotiating to build oil and gas pipelines from Kazakhstan. In January 2001, oil industry journals saw little diplomatic success for the U S in creating alliances in the region. They noted, however, that the incoming Bush administration, heavy in oil and related interests, would likely try to reverse this trend.

In February 1998, Unocal Corporation testified, to the House Committee on Internal Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, that the “*Taliban government in Afghanistan is an obstacle*” to having an oil pipeline from the Caspian region to the Indian Ocean, that is, through Afghanistan. In 1997, Unocal even tried to bribe the Taliban with billions of dollars to support the proposed pipeline through their country

According to the book BIN LADEN: THE FORBIDDEN TRUTH (2002), the Bush administration was under pressure from the United States oil companies. The Bush administration held extensive talks with the Taliban regime, from February to August 2001, with the aim of securing control over the vast oil and gas reserves in Central Asia, through the construction of an oil pipeline from the rich oil fields in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and on to the Indian Ocean.

The authors, Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquié, allege that if the Taliban had allowed the construction of the pipeline and U S control over Central Asian oil and gas reserves, the latter would have paved the way for economic assistance to, and political recognition of, the Taliban. As the authors point out:

*The oil and gas reserves of Central Asia have been controlled by Russia. The Bush government wanted to change all that... this rationale of energy security changed into a military one (p 63).*

At one moment during the negotiations, US representatives told the Taliban:

*“either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs”* (loc cit). These negotiations all occurred before the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York.

## Afghanistan and the Opium Trade

Another justification for the war in Afghanistan was the argument put forward by the Labour Government that the arms the Taliban were buying were paid for with the lives of young people buying their drugs on British streets. “*That is another part of their regime that we should seek to destroy*” Tony Blair claimed (BBC NEWS, 2 October 2008).

What are the facts behind this declaration? US government agencies have been important in escalating the supply of heroin to the Western world. In 1947, the CIA's supply of arms and money to Corsican gangsters recruited to undermine French trade unionists in Marseille docks was the beginning of the ‘*French Connection*’ which supplied heroin to North America until the early 1970s.

Heroin trafficking subsequently developed in areas of South East Asia suffering from corrupt governments, endemic warfare and private armies allied to the CIA. CIA support of Chinese Nationalists who had settled near China's border with Burma and of Hmong tribesmen in Laos helped the development of the so-called ‘*Golden Triangle*’ which, after the US forces’ withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, supplied about one-third of the heroin smuggled into America.

Burma remains the world's second largest illicit source of heroin, with an estimated 89,500 hectares of opium under cultivation in 1999. In 1979, the Carter administration shipped arms to the Mujahiddin (Muslim holy warriors) resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. These American-backed rebels raised money for arms by selling opium and by 1980, 60% of heroin in the West came from this area (P V Scott, DRUGS, OIL & WAR: THE US IN AFGHANISTAN, COLOMBIA AND INDO CHINA, 2002).

When the Taliban temporarily banned the cultivation and trafficking of opium during 2000, it was their opponents in the Northern Alliance who continued to control the poppy crop. They now form the government in Kabul supported by the US and Britain. Afghanistan is the source of about 95 per cent of the heroin used in Britain, and the revival of its poppy trade since the overthrow of the Taliban has kept the price low, encouraging the spread of addiction. A gram of heroin that would have cost £60 ten years ago now sells for only £40 (BBC NEWS, 12 August 2006).

A research paper published by the House of Commons Library acknowledged that Afghanistan's small farmers had no choice but to return to poppy cultivation as soon as the Taliban had been overthrown, to pay off debts.

But poppy cultivation has spread since then onto land where this had never been grown before. By 2003, it was the main source of income for 2.3 million Afghans, or 10 per cent of the population (BBC NEWS, loc cit).

By 2007, the occupation had brought about one major transformation in Afghanistan, a development so extensive that it has increased Afghanistan's GDP by 66 per cent and constitutes 40 per cent of the entire economy. That is a startling achievement, by any standards. Yet the Bush-Obama regime and the Blair and Brown Labour administration are not trumpeting this success. Why not? The answer is this: "*The achievement is the highest harvests of opium the world have ever seen*" (MAIL ON SUNDAY, 15 June 2007). A year later Afghanistan's poppy fields produced 93 percent of the world's opium (REUTERS, 10 June 2009).

## **Socialists do not take sides in capitalism's wars**

The world's resources are owned by the capitalist class and protected by their respective states. The capitalists own the means of production; the factories, the transport systems and the distribution points (warehouses and so on), to the exclusion of the working class.

The capitalist class owes their unearned wealth and privileges to the exploitation of the working class by paying workers less in wages and salaries than the wealth they, the workers, produce in the production process. Consequently, a world capitalist class faces a world working class over the rate and intensity of exploitation.

And because the capitalist class own the means of production, protected by the machinery of government; "*all class struggles are political struggles*" (Marx, THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO). Workers should not be seduced by the rhetoric of politicians who claim they represent "*good*" and their opponents represent "*evil*". Followers of Sergio Leone's spaghetti Westerns could be led into believing that President Obama sees himself as a latter-day Clint Eastwood, "*the man with no name*" in the film THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY. But the reality is altogether different. Obama is a president presiding over a concentration camp at Bagram Airforce base, the bombing of women and children and a grab for the world's raw resources in Afghanistan and adjoining regions. In this respect his international policy has not deviated one iota from his predecessor.

Socialists do not give support to either nation states or to nationalist and religious groupings. The Taliban are a barbaric political formation whose minds are filled with religious poison and ignorance. Their attitude towards women is misogynistic, and their world view is steeped in the fiction of a pure Islam uncorrupted by modern capitalism. Equally Al-Qa'ida is a violent terrorist organisation whose leadership uses religion to justify its political objectives. They offer nothing but religious ignorance, death and destruction.

Instead, Socialists want to see a conscious and politically active working class, replacing capitalism and its war and terrorism with Socialism, based on human co-operation and with no artificial boundaries across the world. And common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society can only

come about when workers - those who have to live off wages and salaries - refuse to get involved in capitalism's conflicts.

Workers have to understand politically where their own interests lie. And their interests are totally at odds with those of the capitalist class and its politicians. Workers have no "*patriotic duty*". They have no country to fight and die for. Their only interest is to organise consciously and politically for the establishment of Socialism.

**THE POLITICS OF HEALTH** Capitalist politicians, Tory and Labour alike, always claim that they serve 'the public interest'. But you can forget that.

Consider this case-study of our caring politicians - especially those responsible, as ministers, for the National Health Service. Take the little matter of the drug Thalidomide (Distaval). For 5 years, from 1958 to 1963, it was licensed by the NHS to be prescribed as a sleeping pill and tranquilliser, safe for pregnant women. They had babies born with limbs lacking or foreshortened, blind or deaf, often with other internal damage. Nearly 500 of these victims are still alive in Britain (and about 10,000 were born in other countries). Long after the issue had been aired in the press, Distaval was still being advertised in the Pharmaceutical Journal and to doctors as a "*completely... safe*" drug for pregnant women.

The drinks company Distillers, who made it in Britain, successfully fought off attempts by the families to gain compensation, or even publicity. The SUNDAY TIMES campaign was fought off by claims that the matter was *sub judice*, and by threats of libel action (Harold Evans, SUNDAY TIMES, 13 September 2009).

Enoch Powell was minister of health from 1960 to 1963 when it was licensed, but in 1963 he rejected each request of the parents' delegation:- no to a public inquiry, no to a drug-testing centre, no to public warnings – and no, to his meeting a thalidomide child. In Parliament, he said that Thalidomide had been properly tested, blocking the families' chance of legal compensation. It was not till 1972 that an MP could arrange a debate about the issue. The government minister, Sir Keith Joseph, opposing this motion, declared his personal interest: as part of a reinsurance syndicate, he would lose money if Distillers had to pay compensation (HANSARD, vol. 847, no. 22).

With Labour in office, first Gordon Brown, as Chancellor, decided to tax the small Thalidomide Trust allowances for the support of the victims. Later Alan Johnson, as health secretary, said he "*was not persuaded of the case*" for further financial assistance, even though after decades of inflation, the limited Trust fund could not meet the increasing medical needs of the victims.

Clearly no government, acting in 'the public interest', will accept responsibility for harm done by the state - in cahoots with a major capitalist company.

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## The Urgent Need For World Socialism

The news is pretty depressing to watch. Dead bodies in coffins are flown back from foreign wars draped in the Union Jack. The unemployment figures increase by a record amount. Workers in old age face poverty and insecurity. From many angles, the world looks a tragic mess: early death, social misery and poverty. Surely there must be something better than this wretched existence! And there is: World Socialism.

World Socialism is a practical social system. It will be based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. Production would be solely for use, by free and voluntary labour. There would be no national boundaries; no competing nations, and there would be no classes exploiting other classes.

Furthermore, the problems of war, unemployment, poverty and class exploitation would not occur. These social problems which affect the working-class majority are caused and sustained by capitalism.

Most people think they understand capitalism. Capitalism is about making money and profit. In one sense, that is true. Capitalism is about commodity production and exchange for profit. It is a historical system of exploitation with a beginning and an end in class struggle. Capitalism is global, with a world working class facing a world capitalist class.

However, capitalism is a social system in which the means of production are owned by a capitalist minority to the exclusion of the majority. The capitalists own the raw resources, factories, transport and communication systems. Employers, who do not work, have no choice but to exploit the working class to make a profit.

Unlike the capitalists, workers have to find employment. They do not own the means of production. As a consequence, they have to sell their labour-power for a wage or salary.

And in the process of producing commodities, workers create more social wealth than they receive in their pay packet. Exploiting the workers' labour power is the source of the capitalists' unearned income of rent, interest and profit. Surplus value, Marx called it.

When workers become unprofitable to employ, like during an economic crisis and trade depression, they are forced to take pay-cuts, go onto part-time working, or be made redundant and lose their jobs. Redundant workers will only be employed again when the capitalist class finds it profitable again. Capitalism can only offer the working class social pain, misery and unpredictability.

Workers also live in poverty. Poverty is a class issue which relates to the fact that workers do not own the means of production. As a result, they are forced to live within the narrow confines of the wages system.

For some workers, this means extreme poverty. But, because poverty relates to their non-ownership of the means of production, all workers; whether their salaries are high or low, are in poverty compared to the life of luxury and privilege of the capitalist class.

Another aspect of class poverty is that it relates to the workers' inability to use the means of production to produce what they need to live worthwhile lives. Private property ownership condemns workers and their families to a second-best existence, where their needs too often go unmet.

And capitalism is a system of competitive international rivalry over raw resources, trade routes, and spheres of strategic importance. Periodically, this international rivalry leads to war. And the class who kill each other and get killed in these wars, even though they have no interest in fighting in these conflicts, is the working class.

Workers are pressurised into fighting and giving support for capitalism's wars by accepting religious and nationalist ideas, or abstractions like freedom and democracy. The propaganda used by politicians to get workers to support wars can be crude or subtle. Usually it is the use of fear.

Workers should not trust politicians. They should be ignored. They represent the interests of the capitalist class.

And workers should also ignore leaders. Workers should think and act for themselves. Only a Socialist majority, taking class-conscious and democratic political action, can establish Socialism.

Workers have their own class interests. Economically they have to resist the extent and intensity of exploitation, and struggle for higher wages and better working conditions.

Yet capitalism also has to be understood. Trade union action can only deal with effects, not the capitalist cause. Trade union action has severe limitations imposed on what it can and can't do. Gains made in a boom are lost in a depression. The capitalist state uses troops to break strikes and pass anti-trade union laws. Unions and their workers disappear as industries disappear, whether from competition or emerging industries and new technologies.

Above all, workers have to recognise that capitalism causes the social problems they face, and that capitalism can

never be made to run in their interests. The problems facing the working class will remain while workers keep on voting capitalist politicians back into power.

Recognising the failure of capitalism requires a political response. The class struggle is a political struggle. That is because the means of production and the ability of the capitalist class to exploit the working class are protected by the machinery of government - the police, army and judiciary, etc. To allow production to take place to meet the needs of all society necessitates a Socialist majority becoming a majority in Parliament, and converting the machinery of government “*from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation*” (Clause 6 DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES The Socialist Party of Great Britain).

In short, **Parliament** and similar institutions elsewhere in the world can be used for revolutionary ends. Socialism cannot be brought about in one country.

As part of this revolutionary process, workers must stay clear of the politicians’ reform promises. Reforms cannot make capitalism meet the needs of all society. When have social reforms ended war, poverty, unemployment and class exploitation?

Capitalist politicians - Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrats alike - exist to further the interest of the capitalist class. The government acts, as Marx noted in THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, as “*the Executive of the Bourgeoisie*”.

And the political response from the working class has to be a Socialist one. Workers must organise themselves through principled Socialist parties, here and elsewhere in the world, to democratically abolish capitalism and establish socialism. The object for the working class must be Socialism and only Socialism. This struggle to establish Socialism is not a utopian one but a practical and necessary one. The establishment of a society better than the one we currently endure, with its wars, poverty, unemployment and class exploitation, is worth struggling for.

**THE THIRD LABOUR GOVERNMENT’S RECORD, 1945-1951** During this time... it began a vast rearmament programme, expanded and improved the armed forces, maintained conscription, used troops on numerous occasions to do the work of strikers, constantly urged workers to restrain their demands for higher wages, and staggered on precariously... from one economic crisis to another. By the time the end came and it was once again deprived of office, it was a party bereft of all political ideas, sucked dry of all its schemes to reform British Capitalism...

Today, it has nothing to offer, but a few vague promises on the one hand, and fulminations against the Tories on the other. So topsy-turvy is British politics today, and so indistinguishable the basic policies of both Tories and Labourites, that it is often hard to tell from the contents of speeches, without first looking at the name, whether it is a Tory or a Labourite speaking.

SPGB pamphlet, QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, 1953 edition, pp 71-72

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# The Failure Of Labour Governments

These days it is not often that you will find a Labour politician claiming to be a “*socialist*”. When Michael Parkinson asked Tony Blair whether he was a “*Christian Socialist*”, his reply was “*Erm... it's a long time since anyone used the word socialist about me but it's ...*” (PARKINSON, March 2006). And that was it.

Of course Blair was never a Socialist in the first place, and the phrase “*Christian Socialist*” is an oxymoron: a rhetorical figure of speech in which meaningless effect is produced by the juxtaposition of contradictory terms like “*Christian*” and “*Socialist*”.

You cannot be simultaneously a Christian and a Socialist. The former, a Christian, is someone on their bended knees praying in deference and craven servility to an abstraction; the latter, a Socialist, is someone standing on their own

two feet and engaged politically in changing society in a revolutionary way.

However, the Secretary of State for Education, Ed Balls, one-time aide and advisor to Gordon Brown, chanced the leader-writers of THE DAILY MAIL and described himself as a “*Socialist*” (NEW STATESMAN, 20 March 2006). He even gave a definition of what he thought Socialism meant.

According to Mr Balls, “*Socialism*” meant caring about “*inequality and social justice*”, pursuing “*a set of values*”, and building a “*sense of community by acting together*”. He then went on to praise the “*Socialist Government of 1945*” which, he believed, espoused values of “*opportunity and fairness*”.

There is no mention of capitalism in Ed Balls’s NEW STATESMAN article. Instead, Mr Balls states that - with the demise of the economic system in Eastern Europe - the only practical model is “*a globally-integrated, market-based model*”.

A bit of a mouthful, you would think. Like the phrase “*the post neo-classical endogenous growth theory*” that he wrote into Mr Brown’s 1994 speech when Brown was still only Shadow Chancellor. Capitalism may be global but it is based on the private ownership of the means of production, on international rivalry and conflict, and shot through with class struggle - important factors which do not appear in Mr Ball’s benign “*market model*”.

Ball’s misuse of the English language recalls a valid point made against modern politicians by George Orwell. He said that a politician who used a jargon-phrase - like “*a globally-integrated market-based model*” - had gone “*some distance towards turning himself into a machine*” (POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, 1946, Penguin 1968, p 165).

By this Orwell meant that such politicians had surrendered the ability to think an argument through clearly, with reasonable arguments supported by facts, and instead merely repeated a combination of jargon, empty but orthodox rhetoric, and badly constructed misinformation, such as is required of modern Cabinet ministers “*singing from the same hymn sheet*”.

## Pure Political Wind

Orwell went on to complain about this wretched type of political writing indicative of Balls’s prose-style:

*In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible... political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness* (loc cit, p. 166).

Ed Balls’s use of political language gives what Orwell called the “*appearance of solidity to pure wind*” (loc cit, p 170).

There is no Socialist object proposed in Balls’s article. We are not surprised. The Labour Party has no aim other than to administer capitalism better than the Tories. They have no Socialist object like the one advocated by The Socialist Party of Great Britain - the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

All that the Labour Party has to offer the working class is capitalism, along with its wars, exploitation, unemployment and poverty. And from its leadership its politics is all “*political wind*”, supported by fashionable but fleeting academic theories from the myriad of think-tanks which surround government departments. For Balls and his party, capitalism is the only system in town. Buying and selling, the labour market, and class exploitation are to last forever and ever, on into the distant future.

However, Socialism is not a psychological state of mind, a set of values, and an ethical disposition towards justice and fair play. Socialism is a social system, an objective reality of free men and women which will be utterly different from capitalism. In Socialism, production will take place solely to meet human needs, not for profit.

Consider the two social systems, capitalism and Socialism. First, capitalism. Capitalism is a world-wide system based on the private ownership of the means of production. The basis of capitalism is commodity production and exchange for profit, where workers are forced to sell their labour power for a wage or salary.

And profit is obtained from the exploitation by the capitalists of the working class in the productive process. Workers are paid less than the wages and salaries they receive. This 'surplus value' forms the unearned income - of rent, interest and profit – which goes to the capitalist class.

The central feature about capitalism is the class struggle. Economically, it is a struggle over the intensity and extent of exploitation. Politically, it is a struggle over the control of the means of production. The class struggle is a two-way process: a world working class confronting a world capitalist class the latter supported by politicians like Ed Balls and his political master; Gordon Brown.

Capitalism has a beginning and an end in class struggle with the establishment of Socialism. Capitalism came out of feudalism and carries within it contradictions, tensions and conflicts which it cannot resolve. The working class is a historical agent of change precisely because capitalism can never be made to work in its interest. No social system lasts forever.

Now, contrast capitalism with Socialism. Socialism means the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. Production would be for use. There would be no buying and selling, no labour market, and no class exploitation. Free men and women would organise production to meet the needs of all society. Labour would be voluntary, and not coerced.

The only way to solve the problems thrown up by capitalism is first to win over the workers to accept the idea of Socialism. Workers need to recognise the political necessity for Socialism, to be politically organised, and to then use their vote, through parliament. They need to get control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces which dominate society.

Then Socialist society will be in a position, having got control of power and dispossessed the capitalists by transforming private property ownership into common ownership, to get on with coping with the quite new problems that will need tackling. That will mean increasing, as fast as they can, and as much as they can, the production of socially useful goods and services, in order to make it practicably possible for the inhabitants of the world to have free access on the socialist basis.

## **‘Social Justice’ is Meaningless**

A Socialist is not someone who wants to either retain or reform capitalism but a worker who wants to abolish the exploitive wages system in a revolutionary way. The attainment of Socialism is through class struggle; the conscious and political action of a Socialist majority through a Socialist party, and the revolutionary use of Parliament.

Of course, Balls's sentiments are not new. They existed in the 19th century and were well-known to Socialists of the time like Marx. Marx rejected the idea that you could have capitalist production simultaneously existing with socialist distribution.

In one of his early writings, he said:

*What errors are committed by the advocates of piecemeal reform, who either want to raise wages and thereby improve the conditions of the working class, or (like Proudhon) regard equality of wages as the aim of social revolution.*

Quoted in McLellan's MARX BEFORE MARXISM, Pelican, p 214

And Marx dismissed calls for 'justice':

*There are, besides eternal truths, such as Freedom, Justice, etc., that are common to all states of society. But*

*Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all historical experience.*

## THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

And he went on to conclude:

*But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, viz., the exploitation of one part of society by another. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms... In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonism, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all.*

In a class-divided society based upon exploitation, calls for ‘justice’ are futile and irrelevant. “*Social justice*”, which features in Labour Party texts, is meaningless in a class-divided and exploitive society. Calls to ‘justice’ are only a rhetorical device designed to trap the politically unwary and naïve.

The pursuit of ‘social justice’ through social reforms can never abolish class exploitation. Only the removal of the private ownership of the means of production and the establishment of Socialism by a Socialist majority can create conditions of social harmony. The Labour Party does not exist for this political purpose.

## The Labour Government of 1945 was not Socialist

What of the 1945 Labour Government and its “*values of opportunity and fairness*”?

The Labour government of 1945 was voted into power by a non-Socialist working class to run capitalism, not to “*express*” values of “*opportunity and fairness*”. The Labour Party had actively supported the Second World War, and were going on to lay the foundations for future wars and conflict through rearmament and the development of nuclear weapons. These foreign policy objectives were to come into conflict with their own social reforms.

The issue of the cost of social reforms came to a head in 1950 when Britain became involved in the Korean War, and more money was needed for the

Defence budget. In April 1951, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Gaitskell, proposed to spend £1,500 million on rearmament - a record amount at the time.

Cuts were forced onto the NHS, and young workers - conscripted as part of National Service - were forced to fight another war for the interests of the capitalist class. Many died horrible deaths or came back crippled and psychologically scarred.

The National Health Service and the so-called ‘welfare state’ were devised by a Liberal, Lord Beveridge. In the main, these social institutions were enacted to ensure that workers and their children were educated for the labour market and, if sick or injured, returned to their place of exploitation as quickly and cheaply as possible. They were *not* Socialist policies. They were designed to make capitalism more efficient, not to give “*opportunity and fairness*”. For the capitalist class, who paid for these reforms, they were a political insurance policy against revolution.

When the Beveridge report was published on 1 December 1942 with its clarion call for an attack on the “*five giant evils*” of “*Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness*”, queues formed all night outside the Stationary Office's Kingsway headquarters. It was a waste of time. These social reforms failed to solve the social problems facing the working class. All the “*five giant evils*” are still with us. Neither Labour governments nor Tory governments have been able to abolish want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. Social reforms have been an unmitigated failure. Capitalism cannot meet the needs of all society.

There is no opportunity for the working class in capitalism, except the political opportunity to replace capitalism

with Socialism. No matter how high or low their incomes, workers remain wage-slaves; an exploited class. In capitalism, only the capitalist class have the opportunity to live lives of privilege and luxury.

What of full employment? In 1945, Labour committed itself to a policy of full employment and “*no more dole queues*”. Full employment, or the nearest capitalism can approach to the exploitative use of all labour-power, existed after the war largely due only to the reconstruction of war damage, and the fact that two competitors; Japan and Germany, had been temporarily knocked out of the market. But the conditions of ‘full employment’ were not to last for long. By the 1950s, the unemployment rate had begun to rise again.

All Labour governments have left office with unemployment higher than when they first came into power. The unemployment rate is now at 2.7 million (June 2009): more than it was in 1997 when Labour came into power. ‘Full employment’ is a sham. This policy cannot be achieved in a system that goes through periodic trade cycles of high and low unemployment.

In economic crises and trade depressions, workers are made redundant and forced to take pay-cuts, made to take unpaid leave and, in the case of some BA and other workers, to work for nothing. Even if ‘full employment’ was possible, all it would mean would be a greater number of workers being exploited.

And there was nothing “*fair*” about post-1945 Britain. The means of production were either in the ownership of private individuals or the state. Workers only ever got second-best, in accordance with the wages and salaries they received. Workers still had to strike for higher pay and better working conditions. The Labour government used troops to break strikes in the docks and elsewhere, just as the Blair government used troops against the firemen in August 2006.

Such was the failure of the 1945 government that the non-Socialist working class kicked them unceremoniously out of office, after a partial second term when they were forced to call an election in 1951, and voted the Tories back into power

Labour promise the working class reforms and better services, but the reality of capitalism forces them to compromise and either water down the promised reforms, shelve them, or introduce cuts.

The failure of Labour Governments to deliver reforms, and their being forced to cut social reforms they had enacted, was not lost on the satirists. In 1977, a Leftist folk group called Counteract released a record based on their country-wide tour, called *The Cuts Show*. One song, *Labour Party History*, reviewed the story of Labour in power since World War Two. The song begins in 1945 with the promise of Labour Party policies delivering social reforms but with each one having to be shelved or cut with the excuse:

*We hope some time this year to implement our plans,  
But at the present moment there's a crisis on our hands.*

The same excuse is given in 1964 and 1976. Each time, a crisis provides a convenient excuse for delaying the implementation of Labour's social reforms. The refrain runs:

*So excuse us for delaying for another year or two  
The policies and promises and plans we said we'd do.*

The promised social reforms are never delivered. Each time the Labour government leaves office in failure.

The same fate awaits the current Labour government: a government which promised to end poverty and ensure full employment, but instead took Britain into several wars for oil, strategic influence, and the protection of trade routes. A Labour government complicit in US mendacity; in the use of torture by proxy; in rocket attacks on women and children; and in the concentration camps of Camp Delta at Guantanamo Bay, Bagram Air Force Base and Abu Ghraib. A failed Labour government whose tombstone will read: “*From boom to bust*”.

# The Socialist Alternative

What of the hidden argument by Ed Balls that there is no alternative to the market? It is in fact no argument at all. If Labour governments had solved the very real social problems of war, poverty and unemployment, then their argument that there is no alternative to capitalism might have some substance.

Yet with unemployment at well over 2 million and rising; a majority of the working class still locked into poverty and exploitation in the Marxian sense of the word; and the pursuit of several more wars to the government's record:- the belief by Ed Balls that capitalism can be reformed in some serious way is undermined by experience.

For over two hundred years or so, capitalist politicians and legions of social reformers have been unable to solve the fundamental problems of unemployment, poverty, war, social alienation, poor housing, and so on. They look as unlikely now to solve these social problems as they did seventy years ago when they trumpeted full employment, the end to poverty, and no more wars - despite the Labour Party supporting the First and Second World Wars, along with all the colonial wars in between.

The 'market model' celebrated by Ed Balls as being unique has shown itself to be fatally flawed. The market model of the economists does not reflect the real world with the anarchy and destructiveness of commodity production and exchange for profit. The model said "*no more boom and bust*". But the economy went into crisis and there is mass unemployment.

So what is a constructive alternative to capitalism? The constructive alternative is that production and distribution of goods and services should take place just for social use. It is a simple proposition, a practical alternative to the anti-social drive of profit-making and capital accumulation. Why is this simple Socialist proposition attacked? For one simple reason. The establishment of Socialism means the abolition of private property ownership and the wages system.

## EFFECTS OF CAPITALISM'S CRISES

Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce... The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones.

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# From Capitalism To Socialism

## Capital: the cause of social problems

The case for Socialism is that, with the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society, social problems like rising unemployment, repossession of workers' homes and all the other social problems associated with the wages system will no longer exist. Unfortunately most workers still support capitalism.

The vast majority of workers are unaware of the case for Socialism that would provide them with a solution to the problems they face. They believe that the relationship of wage-labour and capital is perfectly natural and will always exist. They believe that buying and selling is the most efficient way of distributing goods, and that production for

profit and competition is the best way to encourage innovation, invention, greater productivity, and therefore greater social wealth for all.

Even war, a product of capitalism, though destructive of human life and resources, is a consequence of capitalism. The working class are unable to see this and support wars “*for king and country*” or “*democracy*”. They do not see the capitalist cause of war as being national competition over trade routes, raw resources, and spheres of influence.

Workers erroneously believe that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with capitalism. They believe social problems are a result of poor policies of governments and politicians. All we need, they say, is the right political leadership, and then social problems like poverty, unemployment, bad housing, crime and so on, can be reformed away. However, reforms have been enacted for over two centuries to end poverty, war and unemployment, but they have failed and the problems still exist.

Socialists maintain that the problems facing the working class are caused by capitalism because it is a class system, based on the private ownership of the means of production where production only takes place for profit. As a consequence, capitalism cannot be made to work in the interest of all society.

The commodity, Marx said, is the “*cell form*” of capitalist production. Individual capitalists produce commodities, never knowing whether they will find a buyer or not. Production is not planned. As a consequence, capitalism is an unstable and unpredictable social system which cannot be controlled. Periodically there is an economic and trade depression. For the workers it means pay cuts, loss of work, and social pain and discomfort.

Social problems arise for workers from their class position in capitalism. Socialists define class as the way people are related to the means of production. Capitalists own them, while workers own little else than their ability to work which they are forced to sell to the capitalist employer in order to live.

Under capitalism, the worker sells his labour power for a wage or salary. However the worker produces a greater value than the value of the wage. This surplus value is the source of the capitalist’s profit. It is also the source of the class struggle over the intensity and extent of exploitation. Politically, it is a struggle over the ownership of the means of production.

Socialists have always insisted that the class nature of capitalism cannot be reformed away. You cannot have a classless society while the means of production are privately owned. A meritocracy still leaves the exploitive capital-labour relationship intact. The social problems capitalism creates cannot be reformed away. What Socialists say to the working class is that only a complete revolution from capitalism to Socialism can solve the problems of exploitation, poverty and unemployment.

## **Socialism: a historical necessity**

Socialism is a system of society which will allow people to live useful, fulfilling lives and to develop their full potential in a humane society. To bring Socialism about, the working class, and the working class alone, must make this revolutionary change.

But is Socialism a real possibility as Socialists argue, or is it just a utopian dream as our critics would have it? Engels answered that question in his SOCIALISM: UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC. He wrote:

*Since the historical appearance of the capitalist mode of production, the appropriation by society of all the means of production has often been dreamed of, more or less vaguely, by individuals, as well as by sects, as the ideal of the future. But it could become possible, could become a historical necessity, only when the actual conditions for its realization were there. Like every other social advance, it becomes practicable, not by men understanding that the existence of classes is in contradiction to justice, equality, etc., not by the mere willingness to abolish these classes, but by virtue of certain new economic conditions.*

It was Marx and Engels who placed Socialism on a scientific basis. Socialism for them did not represent simply an

idea which had spontaneously developed in the brain of men and women: it was the recognition that certain material conditions and class relations had developed within capitalism which, as Engels said; “*makes Socialism an historical necessity*”.

Marx and Engels showed, by using their Materialist Conception of History, that human society passes through different stages.

First, a primitive form of communism. Then in the order of social evolution came the property-based societies of chattel slavery, followed by feudalism, and then capitalism from which Socialism will arise as the result of the revolutionary class-conscious action of the working class. These great changes in society took place as the result of developments in the forces of production and, with the rise of class societies, class struggle became the conscious force of social change.

According to the materialist conception of history, the cause of social change is to be found in the methods by which society gets its livelihood, by the stages of development of the productive forces. Therefore, an important factor for the revolutionary change from capitalism to Socialism is the fact that the productive forces have been developed by capitalism to the stage of producing potential abundance; but actual abundance and meeting the needs of all society is prevented because production is restricted to producing goods and services only if that is profitable.

Also, capitalism has developed the forces of production into social forces, which makes production a social act. No worker produces a complete product any more, and individual workers are part of the whole system of the division of labour. These forces of production; factories, mines, machinery, transport, social labour and so on, conflict with the relations of production; the wage-capital relationship. These class relations restrict production to profitability but the forces of production are capable of producing much more.

Marx put it like this in his CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY:

*At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes a period of social revolution.*

*Preface, 1859*

So, on the one hand, capitalism has developed an exploited class whose class interest is to abolish capitalism and establish Socialism. On the other hand, it has developed the means of production with the potential to produce enough food, clothing and shelter to meet the needs of all society. So the material solution to capitalism’s problems has been provided by capitalism itself.

As Marx said in THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY:

*Mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve: since looking at the matter more closely we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or at least in the process of formation.*

Capitalism contains the seeds of Socialism and it is the historic role of the working class to act in their own interest in bringing about a Socialist society.

Marx put it this way in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte:

*Men make their own history but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted by the past.*

So in this respect capitalism shapes and determines the society to come. The social nature of production, the class struggle between capital and wage labour, the needs arising from this struggle, the problems which capitalism causes but cannot solve, the contradiction between the forces of production and the social relations of production: all these

determine the form of the future Socialist society. The Socialist case against capitalism is not an appeal to morality. It is the simple fact that capitalism has outlived its social usefulness. The social forces of production have outgrown the profit system

*[To be continued in Socialist Studies 74]*

It required the labour of thousands of years for us to learn a little of how to calculate the more remote natural effects of our actions in the field of production, but it has been still more difficult in regard to the more remote social effects of these actions. We mentioned the potato and the resulting spread of scrofula. But what is scrofula compared to the effects which the reduction of the workers to a potato diet had on the living conditions of the popular masses in whole countries, or compared to the famine the potato blight brought to Ireland in 1847, which consigned to the grave a million Irishmen, nourished solely or almost exclusively on potatoes, and forced the emigration overseas of two million more? When the Arabs learned to distil spirits, it never entered their heads that by so doing they were creating one of the chief weapons for the annihilation of the aborigines of the then still undiscovered American continent. And when afterwards Columbus discovered this America, he did not know that by doing so he was giving a new lease of life to slavery, which in Europe had long ago been done away with, and laying the basis for the Negro slave trade. The men who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries laboured to create the steam-engine had no idea that they were preparing the instrument which more than any other was to revolutionise social relations throughout the world. Especially in Europe, by concentrating wealth in the hands of a minority and dispossessing the huge majority, this instrument was destined at first to give social and political domination to the bourgeoisie, but later, to give rise to a class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat which can end only in the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of all class antagonisms. But in this sphere too, by long and often cruel experience and by collecting and analysing historical material, we are gradually learning to get a clear view of the indirect, more remote social effects of our production activity, and so are afforded an opportunity to control and regulate these effects as well.

This regulation, however, requires something more than mere knowledge. It requires a complete revolution in our hitherto existing mode of production, and simultaneously a revolution in our whole contemporary social order.

Engels, from THE PART PLAYED BY LABOUR IN THE TRANSITION OF APE TO MAN

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## The US, Iran and China

No rational person who is not encumbered with nationalism or religious mania could look at world society today and fail to see capitalism at work. It is capitalism that divides the world into national states which build up armed forces and confront each other over questions of frontiers, territory and natural resources.

It is working class acceptance of this capitalist system with its perverse ideology of nationalism and profit-motivation that enables the class system to continue. The control of the mass media - television, radio, the press and the schools - by governments, acting as agents for the capitalist class, means that the social relations favourable to continuing capitalism are promoted as the only viable ones. Religion is an intrinsic part of the system of myths that keeps workers on their knees as wage-slaves, worrying about what might happen to them when they die.

It is hardly surprising however that the television, radio and mass press commentators saw that conflicts in Iran and China in June and July, in terms of discontent and power-struggles between good and evil determined by how British and American interests were affected. They never mention capitalism. It is the greed of rivals, not the system of plunder for profits that is to blame.

Iraq, which is still suffering the frequent occurrence of car-bombings after six years of 'liberation'. Endured a string of bombings that rocked Baghdad on April 6th, killing 33 and injuring 93 people. A TELETXT report stated that the Sunni Awakening Council group is angry over the arrest of their leader on terrorism charges. In all these killings,

Muslims are killing Muslims. On April 23rd, Hillary Clinton, President Obama's Secretary of State, attacked Pakistan for "*abdicating to the Taliban*" by allowing them to impose Islamic law in part of the country. The Obama government supplied weapons to Pakistan to put down 'insurgents' on the Afghanistan border. America also bombed 'insurgents' in Pakistan territory.

With Pakistan already up to its neck in sporadic civil war, the Obama administration is seeking to expand the training of Pakistan's military along its Afghan border, with 9000 paramilitarists.

It should be remembered that, during the 2008 presidential election campaign, when she was asked what she would do if a nuclear Iran attacked Israel, Hillary Clinton said she would "*utterly annihilate them*". Capitalism with the aid of modern science and technology has built a vast capacity for annihilation.

Obama aims to spend an additional war budget of \$3 billion over five years to train and equip Pakistan's military and is constantly appealing for more troops in Afghanistan. He is reported saying on July 12, that Afghanistan is an increasingly deadly conflict: "*it is a serious fight but one essential for the future stability of the country*" (CEEFAQ)..

With town and villages being bombed and men, women and children being killed, future stability is an unlikely outcome – unless it is stability for the oil companies to build pipelines from the Central Asian republics. Typical of the conflicting reports coming out of Afghanistan is one for May 21. The US carried out an attack in which they claimed over the month "*only*" thirty people were killed. Afghan sources claimed 140 civilians died.

On 4th July during his visit to Moscow, President Obama gave us a chilling reminder of the threat of nuclear extermination with which American-led capitalism has confronted mankind. The proliferation of these insane weapons to at least seven other countries was started by America which, in the name of "*freedom and democracy*" remains the only nation to have used nuclear weapons on human targets. In Moscow, Obama and his opposite number Dmitry Medvedev agreed to cut their nuclear stockpile by one-third to 1,500 each, over five years. Jeremy Paxman on BBC 2's NEWSNIGHT was prompted to note with alarm that this is still enough to wipe us all out. It had been stated that US and Russian relations were at their lowest since the years of the Cold War, and Mr Medvedev was clearly not impressed with Mr Obama's assurances that the US 'shield' of rockets in Poland, facing towards Russia, were no threat to that country. Obama paid lip-service to the zero-option, as his predecessors have been doing for thirty years, but he knows that capitalism without nuclear weapons is no longer possible.

To rid the world of these - and of weapons in general – it is necessary to establish Socialism. In a world community, there would be no ruling class hoping to gain from war or fearing attack from hostile rivals. In March this year, Medvedev gave as the reason for massive Russian rearmament that "*it is a response to NATO expansion, terrorism and local conflicts*" (CEEFAQ, 16 March 2009).

## Iran

In June, presidential elections were held in Iran and official figures claimed that with an 85 per cent turnout, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad got 62.6 per cent of the votes. There followed massive demonstrations in opposition, led by a party whose leader Mir Hussein Mousavi claimed that there had been widespread vote-rigging and the election was therefore a fraud. The Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini who is superior to the President came out in favour of Ahmadinejad, this despite the highest electoral authority, the Guardian Council, acknowledging voting irregularities in fifty Electoral Districts on June 12th. The Revolutionary Guard threatened to crush any further protest.

Ten people were shot and killed in the earlier protests, and this served to deter others.

As an Islamic state where people are shot dead in the streets, Iran is an anachronism, a medieval throwback society with modern military weapons. Iran is a religious dictatorship, a capitalist regime behaving as all capitalist countries do, accumulating vast wealth for a few while keeping the poverty-stricken masses on their knees calling to Allah. The clerics are as ignorant as those over whom they hold power but that power gives them sway in the oil-demanding world of capitalism. They are loath to admit any spontaneous show of discontent and sought to blame the

West for instigating the demonstrations. The chief political analyst at the British Embassy had been charged with “acting against national security” at the time of writing. The charges relate to inciting the protests over the disputed election.

Hypocrisy and political ignorance are everywhere thriving under modern capitalism, just as much in the older, more ‘advanced’ industrial countries as in the developing ones. This will continue to be the case for as long as the exploited masses accept the nationalism and religions that keep the hierarchy in place. Workers must understand that capitalism has not and cannot solve the problems of poverty, war, unemployment and crises, and is in fact the root cause of these problems. A classless world of commonly owned means of production would end these social contradictions, and organise production solely to meet human needs. The confrontations in Iran between the poor and the powerful prove that Islam is no answer to the class struggle.

There is an intricate system of graded, ruling elitism in Iran. The Assembly of Experts is made up of religious clerics and elected, by adult suffrage, it serves an eight-year term and meets for just one week annually. This body elects the Supreme Leader and can remove him from power. All their meetings and notes are confidential: “*the Assembly has never been known to challenge any of the Supreme Leader’s decisions*” (see Wikipedia). Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is currently Chairman of the Assembly of Experts, and has served two terms as President of Iran.. He ran for a third term but lost to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. The bitterness between Islamic rivals can be seen by the threat of force against further public opposition. On July 17th, Rafsanjani made a speech criticising restriction of the media and suppression of activists. He also stressed the role and vote of the people, and challenged the Supreme Leader on the question of opposition to the regime.

The media told us that “*the mullahs are divided*”. They are supposed to be Islamic scholars, religious leaders. Are we to believe that Allah is sending confused policy messages to those who chant “*God is great*” – or is this just capitalism and its rivalries?

## China

Just as with the former Soviet Union, when for three-quarters of a century, Socialists had to endure the devotions of dedicated admirers of Russian state capitalism, so now with China. The same ignorant claims are made about a ‘workers’ state’ and the system being an example of Socialism. A little attention to Marx and Engels would be rewarding. Nobody could argue that China is not a major player in world markets - she is America’s biggest trading partner – and nobody can deny that, apart from millions of surviving peasants, the great majority in industrialised China who have jobs, work for wages.

While discussing the workers’ position under capitalism, Marx argues in the Communist Manifesto thus (Whitehead Library edition, p 30)

*But does wage-labour create any property for the labourer? Not a bit. It creates capital., i.e. that kind of property which exploits wage-labour and which cannot increase except upon condition of getting a new supply of wage-labour for fresh exploitation. Property in its present form is based on the antagonism of capital and wage-labour.*

Nobody could claim that China, like the Soviet Union before it, does not have a powerful, centralised state machine, complete with modern militarism, including nuclear weapons.

Marx saw the working class as having the historic task of abolishing class society, and therefore political power. He says (ibid., p 41):

*Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled by the force of circumstances to organise itself as a class, and as such sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.*

The state represents the political power of the capitalist class in their oppression of the workers and their struggles against competing capitalists in other countries. For Marx, and for the SPGB, Socialism can only be worldwide; it will involve the abolition of the wages system, and the end of political power structures such as the state. (See Engels, THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE, also THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO by Marx and Engels.)

Violent clashes during early June between Muslims and Han Chinese were widespread and intense enough for the government to deploy thousands of troops. The local capital Xinjiang's party chief vowed to use the death penalty against rioters guilty of murder. China's president was worried enough to go scurrying home, leaving the G20 summit in Rome (CEEFAQ, 10 July 2009). This outbreak of violence involving Muslims brings to light the fact that China is a very religious country.

After sixty years of the self-styled 'Communist' party in power, Marxist education has made no headway. In any case, the Historical Materialist view of Marx is that class-consciousness precedes the revolution and comes from the masses – it does not come afterwards, courtesy of elitist leaders.

According to a fact-sheet on the number of Muslims in China by Wikipedia, the BBC is said to give a range of from 20 million to 100 million Muslims in China.

*A survey taken by East China Normal University in Shanghai found that 31.4% of people above the age of 16, or about 300 million people, consider themselves religious.*

Islam is by no means the only religion: the survey says Christianity has 40 million adherents while:

*... 200 million people, accounting for 66.1 per cent of all believers, are Buddhists, Taoist or worshippers of legendary figures such as the Dragon King and God of Fortune...*

Hardly the raw material for ending class society for bringing about the end of religion and the political state power of the capitalist class.

The BBC's NEWSNIGHT programme (16 June 2009) said there are 300 million people in China "living" in absolute poverty. As exports have collapsed, so has electricity, and pollution is life-threatening. Poverty and religion have always co-existed. This is the traditional system of wage-labour and capital with its market- economy at work. In April the Chinese government released its first plan for human rights, to do more to prevent torture and illegal detention, and to boost the living standards of women, and the unemployed and disabled. They stated that the "primary goal remains ensuring Chinese people have the right to make money"(CEEFAQ report). This is nothing more than pure reformist capitalism.

The BBC also said that competition for jobs was at the bottom of clashes involving the Uighurs (Muslim) minority. By July 10th, mosques in Western China had re-opened, in spite of orders to stay shut. No wonder President Hu Jintao hurried home: in a one-party police-dictatorship, to be seen to be losing one's grip on power could be disastrous.

Early in June this year, the BBC reporter Kate Adie went back to Beijing where, twenty years ago, she witnessed and reported on the Beijing Massacre. This was the armed assault by the state on unarmed students – tanks drove through crowds of people in four hours of killing. This was the return to Tiananmen Square where, as Kate Adie stated: "The system that ordered its army to kill its people is still in power". She stressed the fact that nine men who make up the Politbureau hold power over 1.3 billion people.

China has fifty-five ethnic minorities (BBC, 7 July 2009) – the Uighurs are just one of them, so the potential for violent clashes remains high.

In riots on July 5th, 156 people were killed. TELETEXT (19 July) reported a Chinese police official admitting that police killed twelve Uighurs. The official Xinhua News Agency cites Xinjiang governor Nur Bekri as saying police shot the rioters. After several days of ethnic violence in the western city of Urumqi, the state media blamed overseas

forces just as the Iranian ruling clique had done before them. What the final death toll in Beijing and other rioting cities across the country was, we may have to wait another twenty years to discover.

It is political ignorance of the lowest order to suggest that this has anything to do with Socialism which cannot exist in one or two isolated countries to the exclusion of the rest of the world.

Socialism requires the democratic awareness and co-operation of the world's workers. It involves a fundamental change in society from class-owned means of production, with its market economy, wage- labour and the national state, to a classless community using natural resources and industrial technology solely to meet human needs. No rulers or ruled, no rich or poor – just human beings co-operating for the common good.

## FASCISM AND DEMOCRACY

When we refuse to unite with non-socialist organisations for the purpose of defending democracy, it is most certainly not because we in any way minimise or underestimate the importance of democracy for the working class or the socialist movement. It is simply because we are convinced that democracy cannot be defended in such a manner...

Democracy, *in itself*, cannot solve the problems of the working class. Unemployment, poverty, insecurity, and other evil effects of capitalism remain, no matter whether the form of its political administration be democratic or dictatorial. Freedom to cry working class misery from the house-tops will not, in itself, abolish that misery. Democracy is a weapon, potentially invaluable, it is true; but like every other weapon, it can be used either for self-preservation or for self-destruction...

As long as the working class supports capitalism and capitalist policies, it will be tempted ultimately to give its support to that policy best calculated to meet the political and economic needs of capitalism - even though that policy may be fascist.

Democracy for the working class can only be consolidated and extended to the extent that the working class adopts a socialist standpoint. To renounce Socialism so that democracy may be defended, means ultimately the renunciation of both Socialism and democracy.

SPGB pamphlet, QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, 1942 edition, chap. XIV

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# The SPGB and the Outbreak Of War, September 1939

The capitalist mass media, 70 years on, have been incessantly reminding us of the outbreak of World War Two in 1939. Such media coverage reminds us of how that war too was sold to the working class as one of 'good' against 'evil', of 'freedom and democracy' against the forces of Fascism and dictatorship.

This party, being one of Socialists and a party of principle, maintained then, as we do now, that capitalism's wars are never fought in the interest of the working class. It is not the workers who will end up owning the oil wells of the Middle East, whichever 'side' wins the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Likewise with World War One (1914-1919): the SPGB argued from the start that this was fought over capitalist interests, over trade routes and the like.

Ours is the only party in British politics which has consistently opposed workers taking sides in such wars, as a matter of class solidarity and as a point of principle. The only war worth fighting is the class war, that of Labour against Capital. Nationalism and patriotism – like racism and religion – are issues used to divide the working class, setting us against each other.

To many workers today, the picture they have of World War Two is one of a good cause - a war fought to protect Jews from genocide, or to prevent an aggressive dictator, Hitler, from taking over all Europe. Others have an equally misleading image of the 'Socialist' Soviet Union taking up the fight to 'defend democracy' from Fascism. American

workers too have an equally phony picture of American GIs ‘liberating’ Europe.

None of these images is anything but partisan propaganda, reproduced to ensure the blind loyalty and patriotic obedience of future generations of workers, and to continue to divide the working class. That way, the capitalist class can continue to rely on hordes of workers volunteering to abandon their homes and loved ones, and go off to wherever they are sent – to kill and be killed, in organised mass murder.

It is worth noting that September 1939 was only just 20 years from the end of the horrors of World War One, of which Winston Churchill, in describing a history of the Eastern Front, gave a vivid sketch:

*... millions of men [whose] sweat, their tears, their blood bedewed the endless plain... all were defeated; all were stricken; everything they had given was given in vain. The hideous injuries they inflicted and bore, the privations they endured, the grand loyalties they exemplified, all were in vain. Nothing was gained by any.*

On the outbreak of war In August 1914, the SPGB took its stand on the historic and all-important issue of class principle:

*The Socialist Party of Great Britain pledges itself to keep the issue clear by expounding the CLASS STRUGGLE, and whilst placing on record its abhorrence of this latest manifestation of the callous, sordid, and mercenary nature of the international capitalist class, and declaring that no interests are at stake justifying the shedding of a single drop of working-class blood, enters its emphatic protest against the brutal and bloody butchery of our brothers of this and other lands who are being used as food for cannon abroad while suffering and starvation are the lot of their fellows at home.*

*THE WORLD FOR THE WORKERS!*

*THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE*

*AUGUST 25th 1914*

*Wage workers of the world unite!*

*You have nothing to lose but your chains,  
you have a world to win! - MARX*

NOTE:

Below we reprint most of the Party’s September 1939 statement on the outbreak of war. This statement, like that in 1914, not only expressed the Party’s principled and consistent opposition to capitalism’s wars, but also emphatically stated the important and relevant principle involved - the principle of the class struggle. It is this – not pacifism – that lies behind our continued opposition to all capitalism’s wars.

[NB: Both statements are reproduced in our pamphlet, WAR AND CAPITALISM.]

## **SPGB STATEMENT – SEPTEMBER, 1939**

In this, our first issue of the Socialist Standard since the declaration of war, we have the opportunity of reaffirming the socialist attitude that we have consistently maintained since the formation of the party, including the war of 1914-18. With the increasing international tension of recent years we have again and again pressed home the undeniable truth that as long as the world is organised on a capitalist economic basis the never-ceasing rivalries will continue to produce conflicts ranging from mere diplomatic crises to gigantic armed struggles spreading over the oceans and continents of the world. The Socialist Party of Great Britain reaffirms that the interest of the world working class - on whom the untold misery and suffering of war inevitably falls - lies in abolishing the capitalist economic system.

The present conflict is represented in certain quarters as one between ‘freedom’ and ‘tyranny’ and for the rights of small nations. The Socialist Party of Great Britain is fully aware of the sufferings of German workers under Nazi rule, and wholeheartedly supports the efforts of workers everywhere to secure democratic rights against the powers of suppression, but the history of the past decades shows the futility of war as a means of safeguarding democracy. After the last Great War - described as the war to end war, and as a war to make the world safe for democracy – the

retention of capitalism resulted in the building up of new tyrannies and terrorisms through the inability of the capitalist states to solve the problems created by the system of private ownership of the means of production and distribution and the competitive scramble for raw materials, markets and control of trade routes. So little did the last war achieve its alleged purpose that the man who was prominently associated with the Allied victory and the claim that that war would be the last - Mr Lloyd George - now has to confess that even this war may not be the last war.

Among those who support the present war is the British Labour Party, who long ago declared that the peace treaties of the last war contained the germs of a future war... The Socialist Party of Great Britain calls on the workers of the world to refuse to accept this prospect, and calls upon them to recognise that only Socialism will end war.

...The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds that neither the doctrine of 'self-determination', which the Labour party then claimed had been violated by the Peace Treaties, nor the German claim for a new carving-up of Europe, nor any other policy for settling minority problems and international rivalries within the framework of capitalism, is capable of bringing peace and democracy to the peoples of the world. Another war would be followed by new treaties forced on the vanquished by the victors, and by preparations for further wars, new dictatorships and terrorism.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain therefore pledges itself to continue its work for Socialism, and reiterates the call it issued on the outbreak of war in 1914:

*Having no quarrel with the working class of any country, we extend to our fellow-workers of all lands the expression of our goodwill and socialist fraternity, and pledge ourselves to work for the overthrow of capitalism and the triumph of Socialism.*

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, S.P.G.B., September 24th 1939

WORLD WAR II – A “TERRIBLE AFTERMATH”

Central Europe is in an appalling condition; millions of its population homeless, hungry, disease-ridden, living in conditions that are worse than those experienced by beasts. In numberless places, the dustbin is the larder of the hungry...

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO - AND THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS,  
SPGB pamphlet, 1948 (recently republished)

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## The SWP's Appeal For 'Left Unity'

*We were recently sent an open letter, dated June 2009, from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), demanding that the "Left must unite to create an alternative".*

*Their letter is too long to publish in Socialist Studies but it can be read at [socialistworker.co.uk](http://socialistworker.co.uk)*

## Our reply to the SWP's open letter on “Left Unity”

The history of the Labour Party, after being in power running capitalism for any length of time, is that their vote collapses and there is a swing back to the Tories. When, in due course, the Tories also inevitably fail to run capitalism any differently, the votes of the politically ignorant swing back to Labour. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) seem perturbed at the prospect of the Tories winning the next general election, with the clear inference that they would prefer the Labour Party did.

It makes no difference which party runs capitalism: the system is built on wage-slavery and the exploitation of the working class. It is this system, with its market economy and profit-motive, that accumulates vast wealth for a few and poverty for the many.

Tragically, it is working-class votes and acquiescence which enable the capitalist system to continue. It is therefore obvious that the task for Socialists is to spread understanding of the need to abolish capitalism and establish Socialism world-wide.

You worry about the very limited success of the British National Party (BNP) in gaining two Euro seats. You ignore the fact that the canker of nationalism – being “*British and proud of it*” - is embraced by both the Labour and the Tory parties. Being British and resentful of “*foreigners*”, particularly if they compete on the labour market, is part of the “them and us” culture that makes workers support wars. All the major parties claim to put “*British interests first*”.

You say that “*never before have fascists achieved such success in Britain*”. It is doubtful whether the BNP has as much support as Mosley’s pre-war British Union of Fascists (BUF) with their huge rallies. There were, then, two fascist parties - one supporting the police-state dictatorship in Russia and falsely calling itself “*Communist*”.

You argue that the first priority is to build even greater Left unity and resistance to the fascists. This is complete nonsense. After twelve years of Labour running capitalism, there is growing unemployment, a world-wide slump, and widespread insecurity.

Poverty and homelessness are increasing. In 2008, in London alone, 20,000 homes were repossessed because workers could not pay their mortgages. These are dire conditions which the Socialist Workers Party does not even mention but, out of which, scape-goating and extremism grow. The first priority is to expose capitalism and all who support it, including the Labour Party, and argue the need to abolish the wages-system and establish the classless world of Socialism!

Your second lesson from the Euro-elections is as muddled as your first: “*A united fight-back to save jobs and services*”. But workers only have jobs for as long as capitalists (state or private) can make profits from employing them. With a glutted world-market, unemployment is growing in the US, Japan and China, as well as in the UK. The car industries worldwide are facing saturated markets, closing plants, and sacking people. What miracle cure for the recurring woes of capitalism does the SWP have that nobody else has? Boom and expansion followed by a glut and contraction – that is how capitalism has always worked. Look at past generations.

The SWP sees the Tories as the enemy. You still prefer the Labour Party after twelve years of wars, poverty and a new generation of nuclear weapons. What do you see as the distinction? The ups and downs of Labour Party fortunes in their efforts to retain power to run capitalism have nothing to do with working-class interests or Socialism which, of course, are the same thing.

The cheap opportunism that guides your policy decisions is typical of all reformist parties: “*...swallow everything New Labour has done...*” or, to keep out Cameron and the BNP, cling to Brown and “*be pulled down with the wreckage of New Labour*”. What stunning lack of principles!

You cite a trade union general secretary, Mark Serwotka, who proposes that trade unions should stand their own candidates, rather than ask workers to vote for Labour ones. But that was just how the Labour Party started.

A hundred and three years ago, trade union voters - disillusioned with the old Liberal Party - helped in the formation of the Labour Party in 1906. Eight years later, they were supporting World War One, and in 1939 they were urging workers into the slaughter of World War Two. From 1945, Labour’s post-war government launched peace-time conscription and since then the Labour Party has supported every war since, including of course Iraq and Afghanistan. No mention of this by the SWP!

The Socialist Party of Great Britain which was formed in 1904, two years before the Labour Party, opposed World Wars One and Two, and has, in fact, never supported any war. As internationalists, we see the working class as having the same interest world-wide: i.e., to get rid of capitalism and establish Socialism. The Greens are an irrelevance, as is the Left-wing alternative the SWP seek to construct.

It shows a sad lack of awareness on your part about the nature and history of the SPGB that you think we could be

interested in wasting our time with the anti-Socialist activity you suggest. Our DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, drafted in 1904, states:

*That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.*

Do you agree that Socialism means what Marx and Engels and the SPGB say it means? Namely, a classless world with the means of production held in common and with production and distribution carried on purely to meet human needs and therefore without money, markets or the wages-system. If you do not, what is your definition of Socialism? If you do agree with our understanding of Socialism and how to achieve it, why are you chasing all those, will-o'-the-wisp limited ends, instead of working exclusively for Socialism?

It is no part of a Socialist Party's work to formulate policies or offer advice to the anti-Socialist Labour Party as to how to regain power, to continue the misery of capitalism

To use your own closing words, we look forward to your response. We would be happy to hold a public debate with you at an agreed date and venue in the near future, on: "*Which way to Socialism: the SWP or SPGB?*"

## SOCIALIST UNITY

We are all for unity. We believe that unity of party organisation based upon unity of purpose, unity of principle and unity of method is the one thing desirable... [But] in the field of Socialist thought and Socialist action there are today two distinct tendencies to be found: the revolutionary and the revisionist... today the Socialist movement has been overtaken by a wave of revisionism.

In every country where there is anything in the nature of a Socialist party we have a struggle for supremacy between these two opposing tendencies. And these tendencies manifest themselves in opposing groups...

Unity is an important factor in the growth of a party, but it is not the most important. Better far to have a party, however small, with common principles and a common end, than a party, however large, which is bound by no tie save party interest. We, therefore, who differ from these other parties in essential principles – inasmuch as we accept the principle of the class struggle while they do not – cannot consent to unite our forces with theirs.

Extract from the SOCIALIST STANDARD, December 1904; reprinted in our CENTENARY BULLETIN, 1904-2004 - some copies still available.

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# Taking Money Under False Pretences

The so-called Palace of Westminster has a vast number of MPs who are entitled to draw - in addition to their lavish salaries - various other forms of expenses. And this summer the stink of scandal has been emerging. One of these characters claimed money for having his moat cleaned. Others have been found to have dipped their hands in the till in a number of ingenious ways, such as claiming for the upkeep of houses which they did not live in.. Many such House of Commons claims are probably fraudulent.

But even if all MPs were totally honest in their financial dealings, we would still assert that they are, all of them, *taking money under false pretences*.

Consider these points. When they put themselves up for election and ask for our votes, they claim that they will represent the interests of their constituents. (Just listen to the fulsome speeches they will make after being elected at the next election!) We know too that the vast majority of their constituents are members of the working class.

But when elected, there is hardly one among them who will speak up for the workers. Their concern is only for the ‘national interest’ – i.e., for capitalist trade and business. If workers dare to strike, for better pay and working conditions, or to protect their jobs, these parasites who call themselves *our* ‘representatives’ are quick to condemn such “*selfish and greedy*” behaviour.

So, whose interests do they really represent? Certainly, not ours. Whichever party label they wear, they are not at Westminster to serve the interests of the working class. They may call themselves ‘Labour’ – they may come from council estates and working-class families, and have been to state schools and drop their ‘aitches. But once elected to that House, they know that their future careers depend on serving the interests of Capital, not Labour.

In short, they know which side their bread is buttered.

Surely it is high time for the majority of us, the workers of the world, those who produce everything of use in society – from MPs’ and ministers’ highly polished shoes to their well-made suits, from their many houses to their lengthy holidays: isn’t it high time we elected *Socialists* as *our delegates* to Parliament?

Doing that would enable us to kick out all those parasites – career politicians, businessmen, bankers, speculators, landlords and lawyers, and all their various worse than useless hangers-on.

It is high time to put an end to this crazy system of class exploitation altogether, and establish a classless society - Socialism!

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# The Productive and Unproductive Worker

The description “*productive*” and “*unproductive*” worker has nothing to do with the specific function of labour power in the creation of use-value; that is, the production of goods and services which satisfy human needs, and in which the worker has deposited the energy of his brain, muscle and nerve.

All wealth is a combination of nature, which supplies the necessary materials, and man’s energy. This simple relation of man and nature forms the basis of all human activity, and we see this clearly in a socialist world when our aim will be the production of wealth and not the production of capital.

The terms “*productive*” and “*unproductive*” have a very narrow definition which only holds good for capitalist society. The proper meaning of these words would convey that productive work was creative and that unproductive work was wasteful. This is not the case in capitalist society, and workers need not be affronted by being called “*unproductive*”. The perpetually unproductive class in society (the capitalists) are held in the highest esteem.

From a capitalist standpoint the productive worker is one who produces capital; that is, in addition to reproducing the value of his labour power (his wages) he produces a surplus value. Out of this surplus value the capitalist derives his profit, and this, less overheads and expenses, provides further capital for repetitive transactions for the exploitation of the labourer. The expansion of capital is based on this principle, and the greater the accumulation, the greater the pressures on the capitalist to extend the avenues of investment: more markets, more machinery, and greater intensification of the exploitation of the worker.

The productive worker is one employed by capital who produces capital, in the form of the commodity. Capital on the surface exists in the monetary form, but this money represents a sum of commodities of equal value, which when brought into the productive process produces a greater sum through the agency of human labour alone, when additional value is created.

The unproductive worker, from the point of view of the capitalist, is one who consumes more than he reproduces.

One who is paid out of revenue, wages and profits, and whose services are exchanged directly against revenue. Most domestic servants who provide personal services for their employers come into the category of unproductive worker, as do most civil servants, all High Court judges, the whole of the armed forces, priests, parsons and bishops, etc. A capitalist may employ a chef or a gardener, for his own personal needs, and pay them out of his property income. The chef or the gardener does not reproduce the value of his labour-power, as he is merely concerned with the production of use-values, e.g. meals, or herbaceous borders and lawns, for the private consumption and amenity of an employer, who incidentally is a capitalist.

He is not employing them in his capacity as a capitalist, and they are not producing capital or commodities which embody exchange value. But what they produce has only use-value.

If, on the other hand, the capitalist is a director in Hilton Hotels or Holiday Inns, and he employs the chef and gardener in a wage labour-and capital relation, in this respect they produce a surplus value over and above the wages they receive. The meals prepared by the chef are sold as a profit to the hotel guests, and the floral arrangements, cultivation of grounds or vegetable garden - the work of the gardener - are likewise sold at a profit to the hotel guests. The use value of the labour performed in both cases has not altered at all, but the economic relation under which the labour was performed has changed. It is this economic relation which determines whether work is productive or unproductive, irrespective of the useful character of the work.

The number of such workers who can occupy the position of being productive and unproductive under different conditions of employment is very restricted.

## Useful or not?

All politicians, the legal profession, government officials, judges, generals etc are unproductive. In fact, the entire state machine is an unproductive institution. Not only are they not productive, they are essentially destructive, yet they manage to appropriate a substantial portion of material wealth. The state is a consumer of revenue, which is compulsorily levied through taxation by the political parties who control it.

There is obviously a distinction between useful labour, in the real sense of the word, and productive labour. A doctor maintains the health of labour-power, keeps it in a reasonable state of repair; but a doctor is not a productive worker any more than a musician or an artist. The absurdity of this is apparent when, for example, a writer, producing books of fiction, or a journalist is a productive worker. One enriches the publisher, the other the newspaper proprietor. What they write may be absolute bilge. But that is not the criterion, which is whether they do add value to the original sum advanced in payment for their work.

The definition of “*useful*” labour in a capitalist society is a different matter. Useful means that the product of labour must be socially necessary. That which is socially necessary is useful; that which is socially unnecessary is useless. Socially necessary means that useful labour has gone into the manufacture of a commodity or a service; socially unnecessary means that “*useless*” labour has gone into its product.

The test within capitalism which determines whether a thing is useful or useless is when you try to sell it. If it cannot be sold, it is useless. An armoury full of firearms, shells and ammunition is considered useful, as is a nuclear submarine.

The whole range of the killing instruments comes into the “*useful*” category. Present-day society has a need for killing instruments. On the other hand, a scheme to remove slums, irrigate the Sahara desert, or for the extension of education, into the proper study of history, sociology, anthropology and political economy, would be considered useless - although capitalists would always pay lip-service to the idea. In effect, socially **useless means loss**. The merits or desirability of the way in which man’s energy and natural resources ought to be deployed have no place in this economic and social arrangement.

## What is Wealth?

Wealth comes into existence at the point of production and only through the application of human labour. The industrial capitalist may appear to be the direct appropriator of surplus value, but there is a whole background of interwoven ruling-class interests struggling for their share of the surplus product. The banker seeks his interest, and the landlord his rent – both are consumers, not producers. The landlord does not produce, nor does the banker produce interest.

Wealth is not made by Stock Exchange transactions, financial transactions, or any other form of dealing on the commercial markets. It is not made by buying and selling either, although it may be transferred between individuals. Only labour power can do that, in the sense that it creates the things which money can buy.

It is precisely the essentially circulatory nature of capital, and the great division of surplus value into rent, interest and profit, that leads to the mystery behind the relations of production, and the artificial distinction between productive and unproductive labour. With the development of labour-saving machinery and other advances in technology, there is a relative decrease in the number of workers engaged directly in the productive process. On the other hand, there is an increase in civil servants, local government officials and other types of clerical workers.

One of the problems facing the capitalist is how to control this expensive and unproductive bureaucracy, which he has created and which he has to pay for.

But, without the unproductive worker, certainly at local government and national levels, no revenue through rates, taxes, etc., could be collected and no public service could be provided. The whole system would be in a state of chaos, and every capitalist representative knows this. These “necessary evils” are built into the system and form part of the superstructure.

The extraction of surplus value is a social process and all workers; whether their work is productive or unproductive, play a part in this process. To this extent all workers are exploited, because they are under the dominion of capital and have to sell their labour power to whoever will buy it.

Capitalist society cannot exist without its social bureaucracy, notwithstanding that this is becoming top-heavy. The problems faced by the capitalists in trying to keep society on an even keel are nothing compared to the personal and social problems of the workers who have to live and work with it.

Capitalist production has stood the world on its head in every way. The most respected members of the community are a class of rich indolent parasites – the most revered institutions of law and learning are anti-social in that they exist to maintain the class of parasites, to the detriment of the majority.

## SOCIALISM OR SOCIAL REFORMS

The task of achieving Socialism has in many minds come to be associated with movements to make Capitalism run more smoothly by means of social and political reforms. It is important to the Socialist Movement that the two purposes should be kept quite distinct. Only convinced socialists can work for Socialism, but reform movements attract conscious as well as unknowing defenders of Capitalism...

... Socialism cannot be imposed upon the workers from above. It is a system which implies their conscious recognition of its necessity. The workers cannot make the means of life common property without being aware of what they are doing. A programme of reform is, therefore, useless to a Socialist Party, even as a strategic move. The failures of ‘Labour’ Governments, the world over, to make any appreciable difference to the workers’ conditions bear eloquent testimony to the soundness of our claim that, so long as Capitalism exists because it is accepted by the workers as a necessity, it will be run in the interests of the capitalist class, and not of their slaves...

The Socialist Party of Great Britain will not barter its independence for promises of reform. For, no matter whether these promises are made sincerely or not, we know that the immediate need of our class is emancipation, which can only be achieved through the establishment of Socialism. The workers’ interests are opposed to the interests of all sections of the master-class; whether bankers or industrialists, landlords or commercial magnates, all participate in the fruits of exploitation. All capitalists will unite, in the last resort, in defence of the system by which they live. The

progress of socialist knowledge among the workers, producing uneasiness in the minds of the masters, will itself do more to induce the granting of reforms than any alliances would do.

For the party of the working class, one course alone is open, and that involves unceasing hostility to all parties, no matter what their plea, that lend their aid to the administration of the existing social order and thus contribute, consciously or otherwise, to its maintenance. Our object is its overthrow.

From SPGB, QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, 1942 edition, chap. III

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# Object and Declaration of Principles

## Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

## Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system

which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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email: [enquiries@socialiststudies.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@socialiststudies.org.uk) | [www.socialiststudies.org.uk](http://www.socialiststudies.org.uk)